

## Special Supplement

## The Historic 7 November

Thursday 7 November 2002

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affairs of the state informally by staying in Bangabhaban with their units and not reporting to their superiors or returning to barracks. Neither the armed services nor other arms of the Republic could allow or tolerate such informality and indiscipline. Khondakar Moshtaque held his ground for umpteen hours. In the end, he gave in, appointing Khaled Mosharraf as Army Chief and promoted the latter to the rank of Major General. The then Navy Chief and Air Force Chief formally helped Khaled Mosharraf to wear the insignia of the latter's new rank and status. Khondakar Moshtaque expressed his intent to resign and hand over the office of the Presidency to the then Chief Justice Sayem of the Supreme Court. Justice Syem took oath of office on the 6 of November, 1975.

The five majors were dropped from the army and quietly helped to leave the country by the then Air Chief. The coup leaders, busy at the top with bargains in Bangabhaban and ceremonials of transfer of power, failed to take note of what was happening on the ground throughout the country. My gut reaction to the early morning phone call on November 3, I told the young caller, was that the coup attempt by Khaled Mosharraf was bound to be misunderstood and was unlikely to gain momentum by popular acclaim. The change of government effected by the five Majors were widely acclaimed, however bloody, irregular and indiscipline their method might have been. Nor were they perceived by the public to be seeking any personal benefit or high office for themselves. The Moshtaque government had on August 22 returned Ittefaq and Sangbad newspapers to owners, lifting government monopoly over the media. On August 28, the Moshtaque government cancelled the appointment of the hated would-be District Governors under the one-party system enforced by Sheikh Mujib. On September 2, the Constitutional provision of one-party rule under BAKSAL was revoked by Presidential Order, and on October 3, Khondakar Moshtaque told the nation that political activity was going to be freed and democratic rights of citizens restored, by phased withdrawal of all restrictions within August 15, 1976 and election in February 1977. Saudi Arabia and



China had accorded diplomatic recognition to Bangladesh after the assumption of power by Khondakar Moshtaque, and his cabinet included and retained the trust of veteran minority community leaders like Manoranjan Dhar and Phani Majumdar. Excepting die-hard Mujibbadi (Mujib doctrine) adherents, the inclination of the political establishments by and large and of the people in general was as yet to give that government a chance. As such, the move of Khaled Mosharraf was bound to be interpreted by the public as a power-grabbing attempt to fulfil his own greedy ambition, and a counter-coup to reestablish Mujib doctrine and an India-centric puppet administration.

Khaled Mosharraf was also not very much known to the public as a hero of the Bangladesh war. In comparison, Ziaur Rahman was by far much more known all over Bangladesh and to the troops of Bangladesh army as the uniformed officer who formally announced the independence of Bangladesh and the beginning of the Bangladesh war defying the

genocidal acts of the occupation army of the Yahya junta. Khaled Mosharraf had also incurred a head injury at the battlefield towards the end of the liberation war, and as such missed the immediate post-liberation lime-light. I began to form doubts whether or not his judgment might have been somewhat impaired by that injury. By 10 o'clock that morning of November 3, 1975, I was ready to go out and meet people that I knew in the press, in the business district of the city and in the freedom-fighter community. I had an old car and a young chauffeur who reported for duty that very morning hour on return from home leave in Rajshahi. He told me as his bus was approaching Dhaka, words were already out that a pro-Mujib pro-India coup had taken place. He met army jawans on leave who said they would right away return to their units, pick up their arms and march to Dhaka to oppose the coup. He said his own bus was boarded by many from agitated crowds who left their 'work-in-hand' and proceeded to Dhaka with declared intent to organise resistance to the leaders of the Mujibbadi putsch. Combining expressive gesture and words he said, 'They (angry soldiers) are coming. Ora aitchhe.'

The young chauffeur in fact confirmed my hunch, and as I went about meeting friends and acquaintances, he also acquainted me with a running commentary as he drove the car about his own findings from talking to people on the street that he met. Amongst my friends and acquaintances, I found pressmen mostly cautious and confused, I found businessmen unhappy and apprehensive, and freedom fighters outright indignant and itching for a lead to be able to resist the putsch by Khaled Mosharraf. My chauffeur was bubbling with confidence and firm conviction that the coup would be short lived. Khaled Mosharraf's days are numbered, he said. He would be lynched by the angry people and soldiers if they could get to him. That anger was further fuelled when newspapers came out with



reports and pictures about the mother and brother of Khaled Mosharraf at the head of a Mujibbadi procession. The die was cast. On the expiry of 83 days of Moshtaque regime, the night after Justice Sayem had just taken his oath of office as President, a sepoys-people uprising began shaking the Dhaka Cantonment and Dhaka City. Ordinary soldiers urged the unit commanders whom

The Sepoy-People revolution was thus but the raw assertion of self-respecting, egalitarian, proudly independent culture and spirit of the agrarian civilisation of Bangladesh that refuses to bow to hegemonic pressures and manoeuvres, and is bent on curving out its own path to destiny.

The 26 March of 1971 on the question of overall emancipation of deprived, exploited and oppressed people of erstwhile East Pakistan and 7 November of 1975 in view of political future of independent Bangladesh were the two important 'turning points' of our history. The people of the world consider these two significant days as the periods of transition for change of flow of history and ensuring and preserving our independent entity as a nation. And though it is extremely surprising, yet it is true that in the critical juncture of both these two moments, the advent of Shaheed Ziaur Rahman took place historically. So, most of the political observers comment that Shaheed Zia was a creation of history, an outstanding catalyst; again some people say that Shaheed Zia himself created history and thereby attained immortality. He had introduced a sense of freedom of will and a tempo of glorious new history for the protesting and struggling masses of South Asian region, who had a traditional heritage from time immemorial in this respect. No vested quarters or any political evil force will ever be able to wipe out this spirit of struggle.

The immediate revolt of the then Major Zia in protest against the barbarous attack of Pakistan Armed Forces on the innocent and unarmed people of this country on the black day of 25 March, 1971 and his declaration of independence from Chittagong Radio Station on 26 March caused an end to innumerable doubts and dilemmas, deadlocks and stalemates prevailing in our then political arena. It stopped all ill motivated attempts of the so-called politically compromising settlements and bluffs, designed against the greater interest of the people who were deceived again and again. It was Zia's initiated war of independence that brought us shining freedom like a rising red sun, which as a nation was our greatest achievement for thousand of years. But due to plundering and looting by the then unforeseeing leaders and their sheer failures to properly administer the country, the hard-earned independence soon got at stake and the huge masses became fully frustrated and confused for loss of hopes and aspirations. The then leadership of Awami League established one-party (BAKSAL) autocratic rule in the country terminating multi-party democracy on 25 January, 1975 by amending the Constitution of 1972 thus paying no respect to morality and ethics only for holding on power in the face of utmost displeasure and no-confidence of the people of all spheres of the society. All other political parties small or big were forbidden. Publication of all newspapers except only four national dailies of the country was stopped overnight thereby leaving hundreds of journalists and employees of newspapers jobless.

Side by side, manifold new rules and prohibitions were imposed on the Judiciary. Stunned and dumb struck by such autocratic activities of Awami League who were once trustworthy of parliamentary democracy, the famine-stricken and financially shattered common people had been hopefully waiting for early change of this unbearable condition. The independence achieved at cost of huge blood, untold sufferings and supreme sacrifice was made almost meaningless both politically and economically by the Awami-BAKSAL activists. Just at these precarious circumstances, came down that night of 15 August of 1975, which made the then events of the country's history flow in a different direction. Then swift changes started to take place in the trend of country's politics. Following the military coup of 15 August, Khondakar Moshtaque Ahmed, one of the oldest members of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's cabinet, took over power as new President. Many leaders of Awami League joined his cabinet.

Khondakar Moshtaque Ahmed promulgated Martial Law in the country on 20 August with retrospective effect from 15 August in order to keep control over the country's overall situation under the changed circumstances. But after two and a half month, Brigadier Khaled Mosharraf through another unexpected military coup ousted Khondakar Moshtaque from power on 3 November. Along with this he (Khaled Mosharraf) placed the then Army Chief Ziaur Rahman under house arrest. The news relating to house arrest of Zia, the declarer of independence and freedom fighter, created a tremendous reaction in the Army and among the patriotic people.

Under this situation, Khaled



Mosharraf made the then Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Justice Sayem President of the country. With his instruction Justice Sayem dissolved the Parliament under a proclamation. Khaled Mosharraf hoped that this step would help consolidate the people's support and state power. He disclosed his tendency to his close circle that if necessary he would seek military help from a friendly country. Patriotic people of the country and greater part of the Army could not take easily the military coup of Khaled Mosharraf or his measures taken against Zia, the declarer of independence. Out of this sentiment, a strong revolt took place among the patriotic sepoys (soldiers) of Dhaka Cantonment on 7 November. They became active to free Zia, the initiator of war of independence, from captivity. When this news spread out in the capital (Dhaka), agitated people started to proceed towards the Cantonment. But Khaled Mosharraf had neither strength nor courage to face this situation. Finding the situation unfavourable he along with some of his associates had to face miserable consequence on the way to flee from the Cantonment. They were killed. Revolutionary sepoys and people set

Zia free from captivity. Jubilant mob across the country including Dhaka city became imbued with new expectations, as they were inspired on 16 December. Zia, the declarer of independence, was pushed into power at a time of complete vacuum of leadership when country's economy was totally ruined due to Awami-BAKSALI misrule and plundering. The whole nation became politically bewildered and apparently lifeless and frustrated having lost all hopes, aspirations and expectations. Zia could have had all powers and positions of the State altogether in his own hands, if he would have desired so. The people of all spheres of life were then ready not only to give him state power, but also to reward him with the moon of the sky, if it was possible. But Zia did not want that. He resumed the responsibility of Deputy Martial Law Administrator under President Sayem. Having been bestowed with the leadership through unprecedented sepoys-mass revolution on 7 November, Zia gradually started to play significant role to meet the demand of the time. He restored by phases the fundamental rights of the people by re-establishing multi-party



democracy which was forcibly slaughtered at its very early stage following the installation of one-party BAKSAL regime in the country. Thus the people's fundamental rights were fast given back to them. He had withdrawn all kinds of prohibition and formality which were so

long controlling newspaper publications and mass media. He also brought an end to various rules and prohibitions which had restrained the Judiciary under BAKSAL regulations. Over and above, Zia created an open democratic atmosphere in the country by withdrawing Martial Law promulgated by Khondakar Moshtaque on 15 August. Then he had held free and fair President and Parliament elections in the country under adult franchise of all men and women and

multi-party democratic system. Popular Zia was elected President of the country with massive margin firstly by people's confidence votes (referendum), and at later stage in direct and competitive election. He upheld the ideal of Bangladeshi nationalism with a view to ensuring a greater national unity among the people of all regions from hill tracts to the plain lands since the very beginning of his splendid and glorious regime and to carrying forward an independent and sovereign nation. This ideal has been considered as the fundamental guiding principle of our new renaissance in due course of time.

Shaheed Zia's 19-point socio-economic and political programmes brought about an astonishing change within a short period of time amidst all destruction and stagnation prevailing in the country after 15 August 1975. In famine of 1974, about four lacs of people had died of starvation, whereas Bangladesh made a new record in rice production for the first time under the able leadership of Shaheed Zia; even it was then possible to export substantial quantity of sugar abroad. A flow of positive change was felt in different fields of national life including agriculture, industries, commerce, education, health and culture owing to Shaheed Zia's relentless endeavour, his running about in the remote areas and above all, due to his dynamic leadership.

There was no field nor any phase where Shaheed Zia's keen and constructive attention was not drawn. Development of mineral resources,



communication system, manpower and water resources and decentralization of administration from the centre down to the village government (Gram Sarkar) were all covered in his comprehensive socio-economic and political programmes. Touch of Zia's efficient hand is vividly found in the places of today's Bangladesh where mark of modernism is being noticed.

Shaheed Zia was able to establish himself as an ideal statesman during the half decade of his short regime. And it was possible due to his realistic and conscious attitude, working efficiency, genuine patriotism, honesty and dynamic leadership. Being a head of state of a small and developing country, he became capable of making himself centre of attraction prominently in such great aspects as regional cooperation among South Asian states or peace process in the Middle East. Any nation can feel pride for such a soldier, politician, organizer and above all, a statesman.

There is a section of persons or group of vested interest, mean-minded and vindictive politicians and their stupid followers who often complain that Ziaur Rahman having been involved in military coup had killed democracy in the country. But question arises, how? No conscious man is now ignored of the persons who led the military coups against Sheikh Mujibur Rahman or Khondakar Moshtaque Ahmed, another elderly leader of his own party. That their complaints against Shaheed Zia are completely baseless are well understood by them. The ultimate motives of their various false, fabricated and baseless complaints are to conceal all their sheer failures and to sustain their political existence. It was Shaheed Zia who presented them new political life by re-establishing multi-party democracy after the end of one-party BAKSAL regime. The leadership which, formed the one-party BAKSAL and dissolved into filthy whirlpool the then all political parties of this country even including Bangladesh Awami League, should have no possible chance to do politics in the name of that organization. It was Shaheed Zia who had made it possible. Though they do not want to recall or recollect this fact, people of this country have not forgotten this. They have not forgotten Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) which believes in democratic, social and religious values established by Zia. They have not forgotten the politics of development, prosperity, national interest and of safeguarding independence and sovereignty of that party. As a result, BNP had taken over power again and again with massive people's mandate during the last three decades after independence. And on the otherhand, vested quarters, plunderers and traitors were rejected. Despite repeated and vigorous attempts, they could not erase the name of unique and popular personality of Shaheed Zia from the history of this country; they could not wipe out the memory of long anti-autocratic movement of BNP from the mind of the people and above all, the politics of uncompromising leadership and contribution of Begum Khaleda Zia, worthy and competent successor of Shaheed Zia.

7 November is the sepoys-masses' day of reawakening to safeguard the existence, independence and sovereignty of this country, as this day gave the declarer of independence and freedom fighter Ziaur Rahman the country's future leadership by setting him free from captivity. 7 November is another day of terrible defeat for those self-seeking and jealous quarters who wanted to keep Ziaur Rahman out of the sight of the public by detaining him in complete concealment. Out of grief of this defeat, the Awami League government cancelled 7 November as the day of observance of sepoys-masses' revolution and public holiday after coming to power in 1996 after long 'twenty-one years' by bluffing the people of the country. And they became involved in numerous false and wrong propaganda about this day. Nevertheless, it is an undeniable fact that it is the revolution of 7 November through which the tempo of actual and effective change of the lot of frustrated vast common people was initiated. The people of the country had the opportunity again to find the significance of Bangladeshi nationalism of Shaheed Zia at this very flow of change at later stage. For this very reason, sepoys-masses' historic revolution and reappearance of the declarer of independence, freedom fighter and a brilliant man Ziaur Rahman are so significant to the common people of this country.

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